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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001688

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR GREEN/DORMANDY
LONDON FOR POL-BELL

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: INCIDENTS ALONG BLOCKADED HIGHWAYS

REF: KATHMANDU 1679

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Saran Mahat gave a briefing on the current situation to reassure the diplomatic community. However, there have been a couple of Maoist attacks along the highways and the traffic patterns are varying - decreasing on one of the main roads, returning to almost normal on the second main road, and increasing on the third main highway. The Maoist-threatened industries remain closed and are continuing their talks with the government and negotiations with the Maoists to try to reopen. Maoists continue to spread fear in Kathmandu by placing explosives in local government offices. End Summary.

MFA REASSURES DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY

2. (C) On August 24, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Prakash Saran Mahat assured the diplomatic community that Kathmandu Valley was "not under siege," contrary to foreign press reports. He explained that the Maoists were using fear tactics to show they could create major problems in the capital and could disrupt public lives. Mahat said that although the Maoists lacked the capacity to enforce the blockade, people did not want to take the risk. He predicted the Maoists would try and create incidents, but reassured the diplomatic corps that Kathmandu Valley was safe overall. He acknowledged that while there were no major gatherings of Maoists near Kathmandu Valley, they were entering in small numbers to do acts to maintain the climate of fear. Mahat set forth the steps the government had taken to provide security: establishing a convoy system, increasing patrols by 8,000 security forces in Kathmandu Valley, mobilizing air surveillance, and providing increased security to diplomatic missions.

3. (C) Mahat further noted that the Thai Embassy had received a letter threatening a proposed visit by the Thai Deputy Prime Minister (septel). He reiterated that the government was providing security to all the diplomatic missions and their employees. On the subject of possible peace talks, the Minister stated that the government was serious and would do its best, but it would not give in to the Maoist demands before talks just because of the pressure of the blockade. Foreign Secretary Acharya added that the Cabinet had agreed last week to follow through on its earlier promises to compensate industries and transporters hurt in this and earlier closures. He said that the government has already started making payments to those harmed in previous incidents. Nepal National Security Council coordinator MG Kul Bahadur Khadka told the Ambassador that the Deuba government has also guaranteed to pay if someone is killed during this blockade. The government hoped that this would increase the readiness of people to travel.

BLOCKADE CONTINUES, TRAFFIC VARIABLE, INCIDENTS STARTING

4. (C) The blockade continues and incidents of Maoist attacks on the blockade route have started. Major General Khadka told the DATT that he believed that the attacks will only slow traffic and force people to use Army provided convoys. Traffic is variable - decreasing on one of the three major roads, but increasing on the others. At mid-day on August 24, on the road going East, past Bhaktapur and east of Panchkahl (about 30 kilometers from Kathmandu), RNA Headquarters reported that Maoists had just ambushed a platoon of approximately 40 men who were clearing the road near Palephi. The Army has dispatched attack helicopters and reinforcements. RNA Headquarters is still obtaining preliminary information and there are no reports of casualties yet. However, as of 2:00 pm August 24, the traffic traveling on this road does not seem to have been affected and was much higher than Monday. Police sources explained that the Maoists had erected a blockade for two

days, but had now removed it. With the removal of that blockade, the number was back up to 552 total vehicles (192 buses, 69 trucks, 145 light vehicles, 146 motor-bikes).
15. (U) On the night of August 23, off the Tribhuvan Highway (leading west to Pokhara), Maoists damaged three trucks that were traveling on a back road and not part of a military convoy. Security forces responded to the scene. This incident does not appear to have affected traffic and as of August 24, the traffic on this road had increased. As of 3:00 p.m. August 24, on the west and south Prithvi-Tribhuvan Highway there were a total of 806 vehicles (146 buses, 136 mini-trucks, 303 light vehicles, and 221 motorbikes). On the road north to and from Nuwakot, as of 2:00 p.m. August 24, fewer vehicles traveled than yesterday - a total of 31 (compared to 187 yesterday) vehicles (1 bus, 5 mini-vans, 25 light vehicles, and an unreported number of motorbikes).

MAJOR COMPANIES REMAIN CLOSED - FRUSTRATION GROWING

16. (C) The managing director of Coca Cola's business in Nepal, Bottlers Nepal, on August 24 again asked the Embassy for advice. He stated that some of the companies, including Soaltee Hotel and Surya Tobacco, but not Coca Cola, were considering stopping payment of taxes to the government while they were shut. Singh agreed with Emboffs that the blame for the industries' closure lies squarely with the Maoists. He will suggest to Coca Cola India, which handles all press relations, that Coca Cola India issue a press statement condemning the Maoists. In the meantime, he said that the companies continued to work with Sudip Pathak, President of Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON), and others to negotiate with the Maoists. The companies and NGOs have held daily talks with the government, in reply to the Maoist demand that they pressure the government.

OTHER VIOLENCE

17. (U) Within Kathmandu, Nepali police reported that at approximately 1130 a.m. local time, the RNA had defused a pressure cooker bomb in the land reform office in Babar Mahal, a location close to an area frequented by tourists. Also within the Kathmandu Valley, a bomb exploded on the second floor of a four-floor Agricultural Development Office building in Sukedhara, which is close to the area of the assassinations reported reftel. An accountant broke his leg jumping out of a fourth floor window and the landlady sustained minor injuries. In Nepalgunj, in the Terai, unconfirmed reports indicate that a bomb may have been detonated on the evening of August 23 near a hotel. We are seeking confirmation.

MORIARTY